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ABSTRACT

This brochure provides teachers, students, and parents with information on how to connect to a computer network; describes some of the education offerings available to network users; and offers hints to help make exploration of computer networks easy and successful. The brochure explains the equipment needed to connect to a computer network; ways to access the Internet--from getting a free account to signing up with a commercial provider; using e-mail and joining listserv discussion groups; definitions of the World Wide Web, Telnet, and Gopher; tips for using computer networks; finding education information on computer networks; and descriptions of AskEric--the personalized question-answering service providing education information--and the National Parent Information Network--a Web server devoted to child development, care, and the education and parenting of children from birth through early adolescence. A sample list of listserv discussion groups for educators and parents is provided, in addition to the uniform resource locators (URLs) and telephone numbers for each of the ERIC Clearinghouses, Adjuncts, and support components. (SWC)

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# Getting Online:

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## A Friendly Guide for Teachers, Students, and Parents



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Internet. Cyberspace. Computer networks. Information superhighway. Seems as if you can't open a magazine or turn on the TV without running into one of those words. If you're a teacher, parent, or student, you're probably wondering what's out there for you, and whether you need to be a technology wizard to find it.

Staff from the ERIC system, the nationwide education information network sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education's National Library of Education, are eager to help you use this new way to get information about teaching, learning, and parenting. We've put together this brochure to help you:

- Figure out what you need to get online.
- Describe some of the education offerings available to network users.
- Offer hints to help make your exploration of computer networks easy and successful.

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***We're excited about having one more way to share information about teaching, learning, and parenting, but we haven't let our enthusiasm for computer networks get in the way of our main business—serving you! You can contact ERIC staff via toll-free phone, fax, or e-mail, as well as in person at many education conferences, workshops, and presentations. Call 1–800–LET–ERIC for more information. We look forward to hearing from you.***

## Plugging In

At minimum, you'll need the following to access a network:

- A personal computer.
- A modem.
- Communications software.
- An account with a network provider.

It doesn't matter what kind of computer you have—you can access a network with an IBM PC, a look-alike, or a Macintosh. If your computer is fairly new, you may have a built-in modem—a telecommunications device that lets your computer connect to another through phone lines.

If you don't have a built-in modem, or if you want a faster one, you can buy one to add to your computer. The important thing to know about modems is that faster is better. You can tap into a network with a 2400 bps modem (that's bits per second, the speed at which information is sent between machines), but you'll have much less wait time if your modem is 14.4 Kbps or 28.8 Kbps. Having a faster modem is especially important if you want to capture pictures or sounds as well as just text.

Communications software is a program that resides on your machine, tells the modem what to do, and enables you to send ("upload") and receive ("download") information. If your computer has a built-in modem, it already has communications software too. If you're buying a modem, communications software is usually included in the price.

With a computer, a modem, and communications software, you can dial directly into a bulletin board—an electronic site where people post messages and files, usually about a single topic. (Some bulletin boards have toll-free numbers; for others, you'll pay the price of a local or long-distance phone call while you're online.)

## Gaining Access to the Internet

If you want to gain access to the Internet—the worldwide network of computer networks, which includes thousands of databases, discussion groups, and files on every topic imaginable—you'll need to set up an account with an Internet provider. Possibilities range from getting a free account if you're a student at certain colleges and universities to signing up with a commercial online service that will charge you either a flat monthly fee or an actual online usage fee. Here are some places to try first:

- A local college or university.
- A public library.
- Your state board of education or school district (if you're a teacher) or other place of employment.

If you're not able to obtain an Internet connection through one of these institutions, you might try:

- Talking to people at your local computer store.
- Browsing through a computer newspaper, often available for free at computer stores.
- Calling the Association of Computer User Groups at 914–876–6678 for an automated listing of user groups organized by area code, ZIP code, or state. (While few user groups provide direct Internet access, they can provide tips on how to get connected and what to do once you are in.)
- Having a friend with access to the World Wide Web check out Yahoo's Index of Internet Service Providers at http://www.yahoo.com, under the path Business and Economy, Companies, Internet Services, Internet Access Providers.

Commercial networks such as America Online, CompuServe, and Prodigy provide full or partial access to the Internet in addition to their own offerings, which include reference services, online publications, online chats, and travel planning. Many users also find commercial services more attractive, friendlier, and easier to use than direct connections to the Internet.

If all you want is access to the Internet, you can probably obtain it more economically using one of the methods above. If, however, you're interested in the many other resources available through commercial services, the Internet access you receive from them may be a nice plus.

## Getting Started

When you set up an account with an Internet access provider, you are given (or you may select) an e-mail address, usually consisting of some variation of your name, followed by the "@" sign, then the name of the computer or service you're connected to and its type example, "edu" for education or "com" for company.

The first thing many people like to do when they get online is to send e-mail to someone else. To do this, you need to know the other person's e-mail address and follow the instructions from your Internet access provider. If you enjoy this method of communication and want to be part of an ongoing discussion on a topic of interest to you, you'll probably want to join one or more discussion groups, called listservs.

You can join a listserv by subscribing, then sending messages (or simply reading them). To subscribe, send a message to: *listserv@the-listserv's-address*. Leave the subject line blank. For the body of the message, type: *subscribe listservname your-first-name your-last-name*. Do not add any other text such as your name.

### A sampling of listservs for educators and parents:

ECENET-L@postoffice.cso.uiuc.edu
Early childhood education

EDINFO@inet.ed.gov
Program updates from the U.S. Department of Education (subscribe to listproc@inet.ed.gov)

EDNET@nic.umass.edu
Internet use in education

K12ADMIN@listserv.syr.edu
Elementary and secondary school administration

KIDSPHERE-request@vms.cis.pitt.edu
Collaborative network-based K–12 projects

LM_NET@listserv.syr.edu
School library and media services

PARENTING-L@postoffice.cso.uiuc.edu
Parenting issues



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In addition to using the Internet to communicate with others, you can use it to locate and print or save to disk a wealth of information on various topics. Here's how:

rld Wide Web (also called WWW or simply the Web) is the popular, graphics-oriented portion of the Internet organized by colorful home pages that enable users to click on linked text, images, or sounds from a single computer screen. For example, a teacher might start by looking at a collection of K–12 lesson plans, then connect to weather data, photos from space missions, or pictures from the Civil War. To access the Web, users need a modem, an Internet connection, and a special software program such as Mosaic, Netscape, or Lynx for browsing. If you have a Web browser, try one of these interesting K–12 sites or use key words to find other sites on topics of interest to you.

http://web66.coled.umn.edu
Web 66: A K–12 World Wide Web Project

http://www.classroom.net
Links to K–12 Educational Materials

tp://lcweb.loc.gov/global/internet/training.html
The Library of Congress resource page for Internet guides, tutorials, and training information

http://www.enc.org
The Eisenhower Clearinghouse for Mathematics and Science Education (U.S. Department of Education)

While the World Wide Web has popularized the Internet, two older technologies may also be beneficial to you, particularly if you're interested in databases and text files.

Telnet enables you to connect to and use computers in other locations as if you are a local user. You'll need to know the other computer's address and possibly a password to get into its programs. On some public sites, the password is "guest" or "anonymous."

Gopher is an information retrieval program developed at the University of Minnesota (home of the Golden Gophers) in the early 1990s. It gives users a simple connection to locations where Internet text resources are stored. Gopher includes both Telnet and FTP (file transfer protocol) to enable you to log onto a remote computer and interact in real time or simply to download files from other computers.

### *Tips for Using Computer Networks*

1. It's organized chaos out there. No one person or organization is in charge of the Internet; it's constantly changing and growing. Reference books, classes, and knowledgeable friends can help you get started. And the more you go online, the more you'll find out about what's out there.

2. Jump in and get your feet wet. The best way to learn is through hands-on experience. Try one of the education sites described in this brochure.

3. Don't worry; you can't break anything. When you tap into another computer, there are limits to what you can do with it. If you press the wrong keys, you'll just get an error message. For example, when you are trying to make a remote connection, there's a chance that your computer might "lock up." If that happens, you just reboot it. If the computer you're trying to connect to is temporarily down, or you key in the wrong address, you might receive a message about a "DNS failure," meaning that the Domain Name Server, a centralized site that keeps track of Web addresses, can't make a match at the moment. Doublecheck the address and try again later.

4. If at first you don't get in, try, try again. There are limits to the number of users who can access one specific database, information service, or electronic site at one time. If you can't get through, just try again at another time. You might notice that peak hours are predictable—perhaps everyone tries to get into your favorite site between 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. on weekdays and you'll have better luck getting in earlier, later, or on weekends.

5. Some material found on the Internet is not suitable for children. Parents should supervise and offer guidance as their children "surf the Web."



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## Finding Education Information on Computer Networks

ERIC is set up to provide education information to teachers, parents, students, administrators, school board members, librarians, professors, and community members in a variety of ways. For example, you can:

- Use the ERIC database on CD-ROM at the library to search for summaries of more than 950,000 journal articles and documents.
- Use toll-free phone numbers to call ERIC Clearinghouses for subject-specific assistance.
- Order print copies of free and low-cost research summaries, newsletters, bibliographies, and books on a variety of education topics.

Increasingly, ERIC resources (including the database, the full text of various ERIC Clearinghouse publications, and personalized e-mail assistance) are available on the Internet.

## AskERIC

AskERIC provides education information through a personalized question-answering service via e-mail. If you have a question about education or parenting, send an e-mail message to askeric@ericir.syr.edu. Within 48 hours, you'll receive a response that may include the full text of an ERIC Digest, a list of relevant journal articles and documents from the ERIC database, or the names of listservs and Web sites related to your topic.

The AskERIC Web site (http://ericir.syr.edu), managed by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology, includes free public access to the ERIC database and a Virtual Library of more than 900 lesson plans, 20 listserv archives, and 125 InfoGuides on key education topics.

## National Parent Information Network

The National Parent Information Network (NPIN) is a Web server devoted to child development, care, and education, and the parenting of children from birth through early adolescence. NPIN, administered by the ERIC Clearinghouses on Elementary and Early Childhood Education and Urban Education, includes:

- Short articles from groups such as the National Urban League and the National PTA.
- "Parent News" based on research findings in child development and education.
- Discussion groups and forums on a range of topics, including multiage grouping, parenting, the Reggio Emilia and project approaches to early childhood education, and middle schooling.

To access NPIN, connect to http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/npinhome.html

## Online with ERIC Components

A good starting point for exploring online education resources is the ERIC systemwide Web page at http://www.aspensys.com/eric, which includes links to all other ERIC-sponsored sites. Alternatively, you can access individual sites directly using the addresses listed below.

### ERIC Clearinghouses and Adjuncts

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education
http://coe.ohio-state.edu/cete/ericacve
800–848–4815

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for Consumer Education
http://www/emich.edu/public/coe/nice/
313–487–2292

ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation
http://ericae2.educ.cua.edu
800–GO4–ERIC (464–3742)

Adjunct ERIC Test Collection Clearinghouse
http://ericae2.educ.cua.edu/testcol.htm
609–734–5737

ERIC Clearinghouse for Community Colleges
http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/ERIC/eric.html
800–832–8256

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Entrepreneurship Education
http://www.celcee.edu
888–423–5233



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ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services
http://www.uncg.edu/~ericcas2
800-414-9769

ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education
http://www.cec.sped.org/ericec.htm
800-328-0272

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management
http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~ericcem
800-438-8841

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/ericeece.html
National Parent Information Network:
http://ericps.crc.uiuc.edu/npin/npinhome.html
800-583-4135

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for Child Care
http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/nccic/nccichome.html
800-616-2242

ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education
http://www.gwu.edu/~eriche/
800-773-3742

ERIC Clearinghouse on Information & Technology
http://ericir.syr.edu/ithome
AskERIC (Internet-based question-answering service):
askeric@ericir.syr.edu
AskERIC Virtual Library: http://ericir.syr.edu
800-464-9107

ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics
http://www.cal.org/ericcll
800-276-9834

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education
http://www.cal.org/ncle
202-429-9292, x200

ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading, English, and Communication
http://www.indiana.edu/~eric_rec
800-759-4723

ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools
http://www.ael.org/erichp.htm
800-624-9120

ERIC Clearinghouse for Science, Mathematics, and Environmental Education
http://www.ericse.org
800-276-0462

ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education
http://www.indiana.edu/~ssdc/eric-chess.html
800-266-3815

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for International Civic Education
http://www.civnet.org/
800-266-3815

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for Law-Related Education
http://www.indiana.edu/~ssdc/lre.html
800-266-3815

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for Service Learning
http://www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu
800-808-SERV(7378)

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for United States-Japan Studies
http://www.indiana.edu/~japan
800-266-3815

ERIC Clearinghouse on Teaching and Teacher Education
http://www.ericsp.org
800-822-9229

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Clinical Schools
http://www.aacte.org/menu2.html
800-822-9229

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education
http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu
800-601-4868

### *ERIC Support Components*

ACCESS ERIC (maintains systemwide site)
http://www.aspensys.com/eric
800-LET-ERIC (538-3742)



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ERIC Document Reproduction Service (sells paper and microfiche copies of ERIC documents)
http://edrs.com/
800–443–ERIC (3742)

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility (maintains ERIC database)
http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com
800–799–ERIC (3742)

ORYX Press (publishes *Current Index to Journals in Education and Thesaurus of ERIC Descriptors*)
http://www.oryxpress.com
800–279–ORYX (6799)

**The U.S. Department of Education provides access to many education resources generated within the Department and offers links to other education-related sites on the Internet. Among the many full-text resources available on the INet Online Library are:**

- **Information on school-to-work transition, family involvement, and technology.**
- **Education research findings and statistics.**
- ***A Teacher's Guide to the U.S. Department of Education* and *A Researcher's Guide to the U.S. Department of Education.***
- **A guide to federal funds for education, including student loans.**

**You can access the Web site at http://www.ed.gov.**

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